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ABSTRACT

The opinions and experiences reflected in this report are those of exceptional teachers chosen in a national competition, "Thanks to Teachers," sponsored by Apple Computer, Inc., the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, the National Alliance of Business, and Group W Television. The report is divided into four sections: (1) the teaching profession; (2) the school; (3) students; and (4) reinforcing education. Section 1 synthesizes opinions on: raising standards for teachers so that quality is stressed at all points, revising work schedules to foster communication and socialization among teachers, and increasing salaries. Section 2, on the school, deals with site-based management, flexibility in schools and classrooms, smaller class size, varied forms of assessment, and use of a variety of materials in the curriculum. Section 3 discusses the relationship between teachers and students, emphasizing boosting students' self-esteem, leading them to assume greater responsibility for their own learning, helping them to become critical thinkers, and teaching them to assume civic and social obligations. Section 4 addresses the need to forge links between schools and social service agencies, parents, business, policymakers, and the general public. (AMH)

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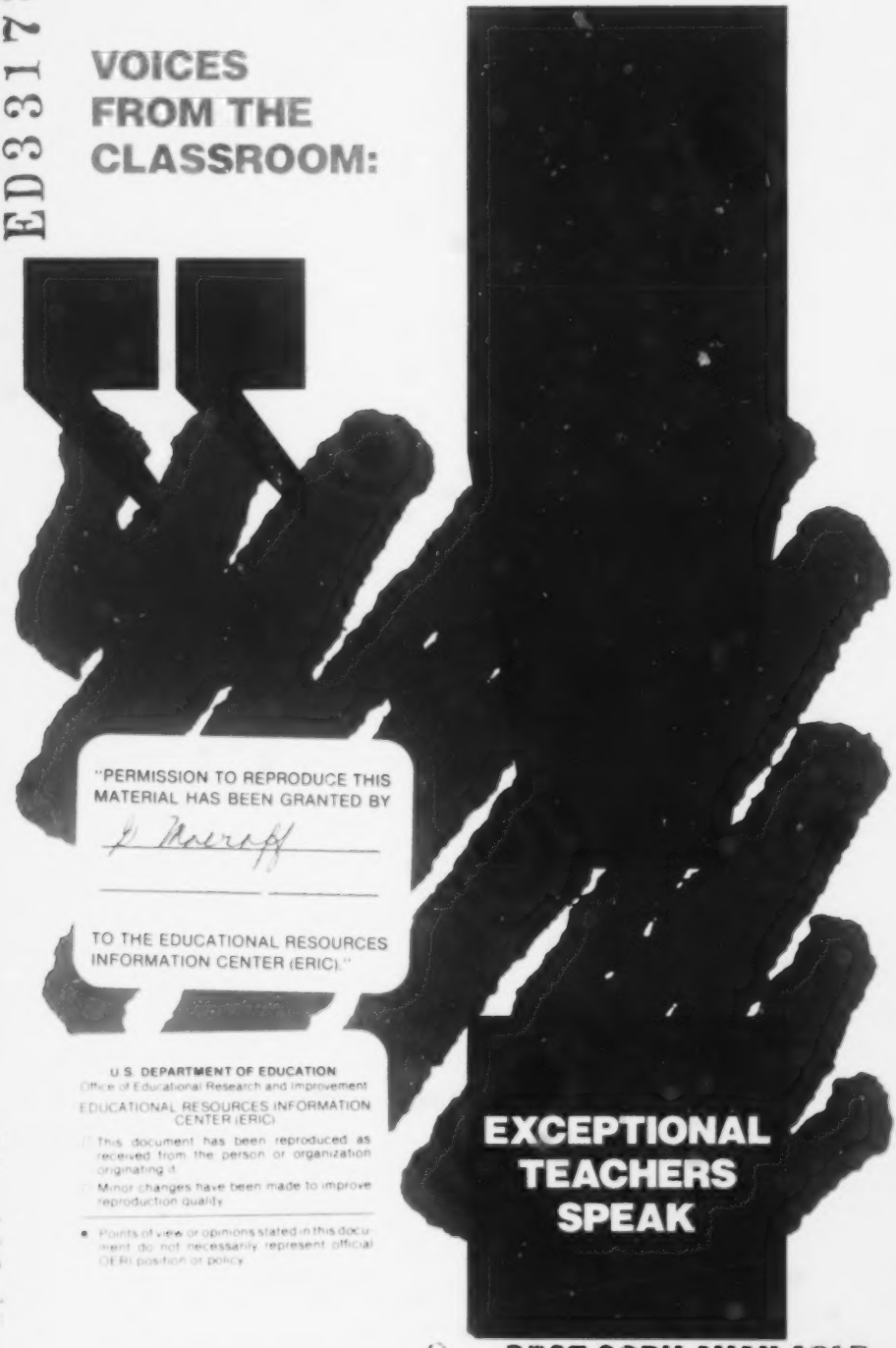

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EXCEPTIONAL TEACHERS SPEAK

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VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

EXCEPTIONAL TEACHERS SPEAK

Prepared by:
GENE I. MAEROFF

As part of "Thanks To Teachers," a national recognition program sponsored by:

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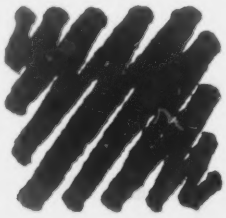
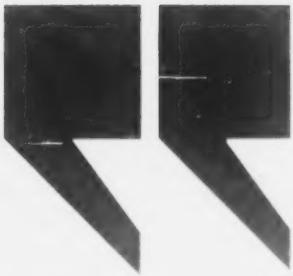




Educational innovations come and go, but teachers are eternal. Teachers are the ones who remain in the schools after elected officials, school superintendents, board members and partners from business have all had their say and departed from the scene. It is the teachers who know the schools best and, finally, they are the ones who must make education work.

Altogether, there are 2.6 million teachers in the nation's elementary and secondary schools, a veritable army of men and women who struggle every day to make learning a reality for 45 million children. It is a job largely without recognition and in which the rewards are derived mostly from small personal satisfactions.

Teachers represent a cross-section of abilities. Like most occupations, teaching has a mix of the good and the bad—stellar performers who make the moon and the stars dance in their classrooms and simply awful teachers who ought to find another form of livelihood. Most teachers, like most people in any career, are somewhere in the middle.

While various surveys from time to time comment on the attitudes and experiences of teachers in general, seldom are the very best teachers, the creme de la creme, the subject of a

report. Until now, exceptional teachers have not had the opportunity to sing their own song. Their voices have been subsumed within a larger chorus.

This report is different. The opinions and experiences reflected here are exclusively those of exceptional teachers, chosen in a national competition called Thanks To Teachers. By being singled out and given attention, exceptional teachers are put in a position to exert their own special influence over educational policy. Further, their views can inspire colleagues, providing insights that might enable other teachers to scale the heights and emulate the very best practice.

It is vital, after hearing from most others who have opinions about the schools, that Americans learn what a group of the nation's best teachers think about the public and nonpublic schools in which they work. Their views certainly ought to carry great weight with policymakers and with any private citizen who wonders about what highly-informed insiders think is needed for school improvement.

This report is based on information gathered through individual interviews, a poll of 230 exceptional teachers by the Gallup Organization, a day-long symposium in Washington that brought together many of the teachers, and a perusal of lengthy nomination files that were produced in behalf of each of the selected teachers.

The 115 finalists were chosen from among 20,000 nominees in a recognition program sponsored by Apple Computer Inc., the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE), the National Alliance of Business (NAB) and Group W Television. Apple provided much of the financial backing for the competition, NFIE was the educational consultant, NAB identified organizations in cities around the country to coordinate the nomination process and Group W enlisted television stations in 23 broadcast areas to publicize the competition in order to attract nominations and give attention to winners.

These are teachers who have demonstrated initiative, creativity and an exceptional degree of professionalism.

In certain ways, exceptional teachers are no different from other teachers. They share the concerns of all teachers about being asked to teach so many children that they cannot give each of them sufficient attention. Also, like others, they feel that working conditions are inadequate and that there is never enough time to do all they would like to do as teachers.

Where they start to diverge from other teachers is in their dedication. Exceptional teachers tend to be extremely hard-working and highly committed. And they always seem willing to take on additional tasks—even though they are already among the busiest teachers. There is no naivete here. Exceptional

teachers know what they are getting into. They are, predominantly, veterans of many years in the classroom.

Given their lengthy experience in a job of continual frustrations, exceptional teachers might be jaded, but this is not the case. It is possible to say, without being banal, that these are teachers who believe in children. They continue to hold high expectations for students no matter how formidable the obstacles and they are very interested in doing what they can to fortify the fragile egos of those students.

Where other teachers might give up and surrender to overwhelming odds, they persevere. They are the idealists, dreamers who paradoxically are rooted in reality, men and women who never cease to imagine something better.

Some other teachers might say they selected the career because of the frequent vacations and the steady employment, but 88 percent of exceptional teachers say they teach because of the gratification they get from making a difference in the lives of students. In fact, 100 percent of these exceptional teachers believe they can make a difference in their classrooms and 96 percent believe they can make a difference in their schools.

A widespread factor in the success of exceptional teachers is the opportunity to work in buildings with supportive principals. Many of these teachers speak of their principals as "enablers," bosses who clear away the underbrush of regulations in order to let teachers find their way through difficult terrain. Exceptional teachers often say that they enjoy the luxury of not having to exhaust themselves fighting obstinate principals. This is significant because there is no telling how many more exceptional teachers there might be if more teachers worked in settings in which they were "enabled" to realize their full potential.

A common attribute of exceptional teachers tends to be assertiveness. From all that they report about themselves, they are ready and willing to act forcefully, if necessary, to get what they consider necessary for their students. They are not reticent about their beliefs and want to be consulted by supervisors and policymakers who are weighing measures that affect education.

There is a popular image of the gifted practitioner working in splendid isolation, but these exceptional teachers have distinguished themselves by reaching out to collaborate and form partnerships wherever they can—with other teachers, parents and all sorts of people and agencies outside the school. In fact, Thanks To Teachers deliberately sought such teachers so that the value of partnerships could be underscored.

The exceptional teachers featured in this report showed an uncanny ability to work with colleagues in order to learn something new or to pool their abilities. They fought off the isolation that so often undermines the efforts of teachers.

No single teaching style appears to bind exceptional teachers. Some are traditional and some are non-traditional in their approaches. They are found in all grades and in all subject areas in elementary schools and secondary schools. Some belong to the National Education Association, others to the American Federation of Teachers and still others to no teacher organization whatsoever. Almost all, however, seem more receptive than most teachers to the idea of students learning through experience, both inside and outside the classroom. They appear to have great confidence in their ability to deviate from the textbook and find alternative ways for students to learn.

Exceptional teachers are risk-takers, iconoclasts who dare to differ and attempt what others haven't tried. Their plea is that more teachers take risks in behalf of better education and deviate from the norm if it looks like it will be productive.

Ultimately, though, every teacher, regardless of ability, is affected by the same societal influences that reach into the schoolhouse. There is no way for even the best teacher to insulate the classroom from the problems that roil a troubled outside world. But a demanding public is reluctant to recognize and make allowances for the impact of societal pressures on education.

An exceptional teacher of science at a junior high school in Anchorage, Alaska, smarting from the criticism she he[illegible] from the outside, put it this way:

"A major issue in public education today is the general lack of public support. The messages come from a variety of sources. We are inundated with statistics from studies comparing American test scores with those of other industrialized nations. In nearly every case we are found lacking. What is often not reported are the variations of the size and makeup of the tested populations. The vast cultural diversities of the American population, as compared to Japan's for example, are seldom considered. Schools are held responsible for a plethora of society's ills. We are an easy target. It seems to be in vogue to denigrate our education system. Time after time I read articles which headline some negative aspect of a situation when there are many more positives."

Despite the criticism and the difficulties it is the hallmark of exceptional teachers that they do not despair. They believe that they can influence change, they want to take on even more of the responsibility for improving schools and they like what they have chosen as their life's work.

"No matter how trite and worn the phrase may be, I truly believe that teaching is one of the noblest professions," said an elementary school teacher in Scottsdale, Ariz. "For it is in

teaching that one can truly make a difference in not only a child's life, but in our future as well."

The vision of better education that these exceptional teachers offer is one that is within reach of the nation. Their excellence allows them to see the problems and propound the solutions as only successful experts who have spent years in the presence of tens of thousands of children can do.

What is needed by the rest of society is the will and the commitment. This carefully-drawn blueprint for educational improvement—traced from interviews, group deliberations, survey responses and nomination forms—consists of the following recommendations:

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

I
The Teaching Profession

1) Standards for teachers should be raised so that quality is stressed at all points—from the time undergraduates enter training programs through the licensing and during a teacher's entire career—with able veteran teachers having major roles in judging others.

2) Work schedules of teachers must be changed to allow time to overcome the isolation that separates teachers from each other and from fresh ideas.

3) Teachers should be paid better and have access to an array of services and support staff that enable them to work more effectively.

II
The School

1) Site-based management should be encouraged so that those associated with each school make basic decisions about its operations.

2) Greater flexibility is needed in schools and in classrooms so that the organization, schedule, curriculum and teaching methods can more readily be adjusted as teachers see fit, especially to let them take more risks in behalf of better education.

3) Smaller classes are essential if teachers are to be able to give individual students the attention that they need and deserve.

4) More varied forms of assessment are required to break the tyranny of norm-referenced, standardized tests that drive the curriculum in undesirable directions.

5) The influence of textbooks on the curriculum should be diminished by teachers who make greater use of other kinds of books, materials, technology and experiential education to provide students with learning that is more connected to the real world.

EXCEPTIONAL TEACHERS SPEAK !

III
Students

1) Teachers should pay closer attention to boosting the self-esteem of students and, at the same time, motivate them to meet higher expectations.

2) Students should be led to assume greater responsibility for their own learning so that they come to recognize the control that they have over the outcome of their education.

3) More emphasis in every subject must be put on helping students become critical thinkers who can reason and solve problems.

4) High priority must be given to teaching students of all ages to accept and carry out civic and social obligations.

IV
Reinforcing Education

1) Links must be forged between schools and social service agencies to better serve children and their families by addressing the wide range of needs that affect the academic performance of students.

2) Schools must work closer with the home so that parents feel more connected to the education of their children and are more able to underpin the process.

3) Schools should expand and strengthen their ties to business, to policymakers and to the general public, starting with programs to invite leading citizens to "shadow" individual teachers through the workday.

I The Teaching Profession

1. Standards for teachers should be raised so that quality is stressed at all points—from the time undergraduates enter training programs through the licensing and during a teacher's entire career—with able veteran teachers having major roles in judging others.

This is an era of school reform and restructuring, but ultimately schools will be no better than the teachers who work in them.

Education will not fulfill its potential unless sufficient attention is given to recruiting the best candidates into teaching, preparing them well, weeding out those who do not show sufficient promise and helping teachers perform at high levels throughout their careers.

Exceptional teachers believe that school improvement depends on bolstering procedures for inducting new teachers, which 93 percent of exceptional teachers believe should include a one-year internship under the tutelage of mentor teachers.

Furthermore, exceptional teachers are concerned about what they believe to be a small portion of colleagues who are not performing well. Although three out of four say that hardly any teachers in their schools are incompetent, more than half of the respondents say that at least some teachers in their schools are "burned out."

This is not a paradox. Exceptional teachers believe, by and large, that America is blessed with an able teaching force, but they recognize that the work of some teachers—whom they call "dead weight"—is a problem. There is a sharpened awareness among good teachers that poor teachers tarnish all teachers, as evidenced by the opinion of the teachers that architects, accountants, lawyers and dentists all command more respect than teachers.

In expressing discomfort with teachers whose work is subpar, the best teachers increasingly endorse the idea of peer review, which until recently was anathema to all teachers. Exceptional teachers say that they are ready to play a larger role in maintaining the standards of their profession. They would like to share in the process, all along the way, of making decisions about the suitability of candidates for teaching and about the work of colleagues. Sixty-six percent say that peer review of teachers by other teachers would be very useful and another 29 percent say it would be somewhat useful.

Exceptional teachers would like to see better on-going professional development for experienced teachers and are ready to contribute to that process, as well. They respond positively to

the growing interest in giving the best teachers some responsibility for the continuing education of their colleagues, a kind of teachers-teaching-teachers approach. This approach would place in the hands of exceptional teachers more of the authority for upgrading colleagues, instead of deferring to outside experts, as has often been the case in the past.

2. Work schedules of teachers must be changed to allow time to overcome the isolation that separates teachers from each other and from fresh ideas.

Teachers, unlike those in many professions, work on their own and largely out of view of colleagues. Not only are they seldom observed by fellow teachers, but they also infrequently see other teachers perform their work. Schoolteaching is a lonely and demanding task that is diminished by lack of contact with other adults and by insufficient information about how others do their jobs. The possibilities of collegiality are undermined.

Even exceptional teachers, who tend to be more involved in professional activities than most other teachers, are cursed by isolation. They want more time to meet with colleagues, to plan with them, to observe other teachers at work and to attend conferences away from the building during the school day. Teachers will do their jobs better and students will benefit when teachers are not so cut off from each other. "When there is no open line of communication between teachers you become isolated and sometimes ineffective," says a special education teacher at a middle school in Dallas.

Exceptional teachers want their work to be more of a team activity in which they share assignments and help each other with ideas. More than half said in the poll that they would prefer being part of a team. What many of the elite teachers have in common is the extent to which they already are collaborating with colleagues on projects, an approach that apparently helps make them as good as they are.

Among those selected for the Thanks to Teachers group were many who work closely with colleagues. In an elementary school in Phoenix, for instance, teachers have been able to collaborate to develop a special program for 225 at-risk students. "The problems that we had to overcome," says the exceptional teacher who headed the team, "were in agreeing on the focus of the curriculum, addressing different learning styles and determining the physical set up of the program."

What is needed is a new conception of teaching that allocates

time differently and recognizes that teachers are working even when they are not with students. More than eight out of 10 exceptional teachers consider the lack of time to prepare for classes to be a barrier to effective teaching. An exceptional teacher in Mesa, Ariz., who works with gifted children in an elementary school, taking a different group each day of the week, says that "time" is the greatest obstacle she faces. "I love my job," she says, "but I work long days, weekends and nights. There is no such thing as even a half-hour for lunch."

If teachers are going to function as members of teams, then schools must create schedules that give teachers more time away from classrooms and, concurrently, administrators must be sympathetic to the needs of teachers to interact with colleagues.

Some exceptional teachers are already thriving in such settings and models exist for other schools to follow. "If I need to meet with a business representative or the science teachers need to help students with their Future Fair projects, our prinicipal gets class coverage for us," says a middle school teacher in Upper St. Clair, Pa. "If I tell the superintendent that I need to meet with a teacher in Harrisburg concerning a project, he gives his consent to the trip. It is a professional and energizing atmosphere."

3. Teachers should be paid better and have access to an array of services and support staff that enable them to work more effectively.

Teachers are professionals who are expected, as part of their regular work, to spend valuable time handling tasks that could be ably done by aides and paraprofessionals. Every time a teacher is assigned to lunch duty, hall patrol or bathroom monitoring it is a waste of a resource. About six out of 10 exceptional teachers say that having to perform nonteaching tasks in the way of effective teaching.

The story is much the same when it comes to support services. Teachers rarely have clerical assistance and often they must beg or cajole just to use the copying machine. They spend considerable amounts of time trying to accomplish clerical tasks that rob their students of their attention. Overwhelmingly, exceptional teachers say it would help them do their jobs a great deal better if they had ready access to copying machines, computers and clerical assistance.

People outside schools usually have no idea of the extent to which unreasonable working conditions detract from the morale and effectiveness of teachers. Exceptional teachers are

not moaners. They usually work hardest and complain least; 62 percent say that teaching turned out to be harder than they thought it would be.

Nonetheless, they persevere, but they feel insufficiently appreciated and their perceived lack of status begins with a salary that they consider too low. On average, American teachers are paid $31,000 annually. In some places in the country experienced teachers who are single parents have salaries so low that they receive food stamps for their families. Eighty-five percent of exceptional teachers maintain that salaries are not adequate to attract talented teachers into the profession and almost as many think that current salaries are inadequate for retaining talented teachers who are already in the schools.

No one enters teaching expecting to make a great deal of money and, for younger teachers, the job no longer has even the assurance of lifetime employment that it once did. Yet, given the tribulations of teaching and the competition of job offers in other occupations, society should be grateful for the teachers it has. A higher salary is part of what exceptional teachers see as crucial to conferring greater respect on them and giving them a more reasonable standard of living.

II
The School

1. Site-based management should be encouraged so that those associated with each school make basic decisions about its operations.

No one knows more about what occurs in classrooms than teachers and yet they must frequently defer to others when it comes time to set policies affecting classrooms. Exceptional teachers crave the opportunity to have more to say about how their schools are run. They are full of good ideas and brim with enthusiasm. They are prepared to take greater responsibility for managing education.

Some observers see school-based management as a power struggle, pitting administrators and school boards against teachers. This, however, is not what exceptional teachers have in mind. What is at stake to them is the wisdom and practicality of the process of arriving at decisions that affect teaching and learning. It makes little sense to teachers that those who are further away from students than they are determine what is best for students—and often do so without consulting teachers.

Survey results underscore the desire of exceptional teachers to contribute more extensively to school management. Ninety-six percent of them urge that the role of teachers in setting policies be expanded. A high school English teacher in Scottsdale, Ariz., for example, believes that if teachers are given the opportunity to try to solve educational problems through school-based management the teachers will then have more of a vested interest in finding solutions.

This is not to say that exceptional teachers see themselves as impotent under current circumstances. Perhaps because they are able and assertive, they already wield more power than most teachers, some of whom would prefer only to teach and to leave decision making to others. As it is, 39 percent of exceptional teachers say they have a great deal of influence over school policies and another 48 percent say they have a fair amount of influence.

It may be, though, that much of the influence of exceptional teachers arises out of informal arrangements that give them leeway that comes in recognition of their considerable ability. This is not the same as formalizing mechanisms that assure their input into decision making and that is why teachers think that it is now time to take that step.

2. Greater flexibility is needed in schools and in classrooms so that the organization, schedule, curriculum and

teaching methods can more readily be adjusted as teachers see fit, especially to let them take more risks in behalf of better education.

A main reason why exceptional teachers want school-based management is because they think that such an approach may render schools more flexible. Right now, it seems to the teachers that there is not sufficient latitude to provide education in ways that are responsive to the individual needs of students.

Exceptional teachers, confident in their abilities, want to be free to improvise in order to change the length of periods, veer off from the required curriculum and vary their methods of instruction. In other words, they think their students would be better served if they, the teachers, could take some risks in behalf of learning.

A second grade teacher in Buffalo, N.Y. says she was formerly afraid to take risks and was gratified by the reception her ideas received once she decided to take chances and introduce new approaches to help her students learn to be better writers. "I am fortunate to work with a supportive administrative staff that has given me the flexibility to try out new ideas," she says. "As I become more involved in collaboration with other teachers , I become more willing to try new ideas and more willing to take risks."

One way that exceptional teachers distinguish themselves from colleagues is by their audacity and daring, stepping away from the crowd and undergoing some inconvenience to adopt or adapt teaching methods or the content of lessons.

"An outstanding teacher takes risks," says a high school teacher of handicapped students in California's Fremont Union High School District. "He gives himself and the students permission to make a reasonable number of mistakes and turns that into a learning experience, listens and observes more than he talks, learns from students, parents and the community, and has respect for the individual student and, most importantly, for himself." This is a teacher, who despite the initial resistance of those who thought he was expecting too much of handicapped students, helped organize them into purposeful vocational programs in which they were to learn to make a living in food service or lawn maintenance.

Many teachers across the country, however, break from the status quo with trepidation because they are afraid they will be seen as threats by both administrators and fellow teachers, who are comfortable with the familiar—even when it is not working well for students. Schools are among society's most unbending institutions. An adult of any age could walk into 90 percent of the nation's classrooms and find the content and mode of

instruction unaltered from the time he or she was in school. Tradition has its place, but exceptional teachers maintain that there is enormous room for improvement that is not being realized.

At least six out of 10 of them want more input in which matters such as allocating school funds, designing curriculum, selecting principals, choosing books and instructional materials, determining salaries, promoting students and making up schedules. Schools would very likely change for the better if exceptional teachers got more control.

People work more effectively when they feel a sense of ownership, when they feel that they are not simply toiling in circumstances that have been thrust upon them. Schools cut themselves off from a great deal of wisdom when teachers, especially the ablest ones, are limited to doing the bidding of others and their ideas are not taken into consideration.

3. Smaller classes are essential if teachers are to be able to give individual students the attention that they need and deserve.

Researchers have failed to establish an optimum class size for all groups of children, but common sense indicates that students do not thrive when there are too many of them in a class. Interaction between teacher and students suffers. "Class size is a major issue in Utah and many other states," says an elementary school teacher in Salt Lake. "Although several studies have indicated that this does not have an impact on learning, my experience indicates that it can have a great impact on the overall experience."

Too many students are ill-served by being cramped into classes in which there are simply too many of them for teachers to provide much individual attention. Exceptional teachers are cognizant of this problem and seven out of 10 cite large classes as a barrier to effective teaching.

Exceptional teachers are perhaps more skilled than others at coping with oversized classes, but if even they are worried about the impact of class size on learning then imagine how less able teachers feel.

4. More varied forms of assessment are required to break the tyranny of norm-referenced, standardized tests that drive the curriculum in undesirable directions.

The kinds of tests generally used to assess students in elementary and secondary schools are based on the acquisition of nar-

row skills that represent only a small portion of learning. Often the tests are constructed in ways that do not encourage or reward students for imaginative reasoning.

Furthermore, since the "norm" of the test is the point at which a "standardized" sampling of students is evenly divided between those who are supposedly above average and those who are below it, this kind of test by definition is one that half the students in a representative sample are meant to "fail," no matter how much they know. And the method of scoring these tests is such that the difference of only a few right or wrong answers can make it appear as though there are enormous differences among students.

Not surprisingly, exceptional teachers are seriously disenchanted with norm-referenced, standardized tests. They complain that instruction is driven adversely by the need to raise test scores. Only half of exceptional teachers consider scores on such tests as useful even for telling how well teachers are doing. The amount of instructional time spent preparing students for the tests is not necessarily productive in helping young people become critical thinkers and problem solvers since the tests frequently do not measure some of these most important attributes.

There is a dilemma here. To accede to the influence of norm-referenced, standardized tests is to surrender a portion of a child's education to performing well on a test even it does not promote proper learning. Not to do this, though, is to make it appear that students and their teachers are unsuccessful. Exceptional teachers, who perhaps understand and deplore this dilemma more than their peers, want to break the shackles that bind them to wasteful modes of instruction.

In part, the school reform movement has been aimed at making education more accountable. A major way that this goal has been purused has been through increased testing. In fact, 78 percent of the exceptional teachers believe that the emphasis on students' standardized test scores has increased during the last 10 years, a period during which the majority of the teachers say they have felt pressured by principals and administrators to spend more time preparing students for the tests.

And just about an equal portion of exceptional teachers maintain that this trend has been accompanied by lessened emphasis on teaching students to perform in ways that do not so easily lend themselves to measurement, as, for example, reasoning abilities. More than half of the exceptional teachers consider standardized tests a barrier to effective education.

Exceptional teachers do not dispute the need to assess students and hold schools accountable. But they want alternative methods of assessment, procedures not as constraining on the

curriculum. They would like to see more assessment that is based on actual performance such as portfolios of students' work. Also, they propose using more essay examinations instead of multiple-choice and short-answer tests. Exceptional teachers favor criterion-referenced tests that indicate whether or not youngsters can carry out certain tasks instead of the norm-referenced, standardized tests that rank students.

5. The influence of textbooks on the curriculum should be diminished by teachers who make greater use of other kinds of books, materials, technology and experiential education to provide students with learning that is more connected to the real world.

Exceptional teachers feel unduly constrained by curriculum mandates that rely disproportionately on textbooks. For one thing, textbooks sometimes are not interesting and, for another, teaching can be enhanced by skilled teachers who are free to introduce students to a variety of materials and even draw on resources outside the school building. "In the sciences, and in particular in physics, things are changing so fast that a textbook is anywhere from 10 to 20 years out of date as it reaches the students as a brand-new book," says a New Jersey high school physics teacher, perhaps exaggerating for effect.

Yet, directives of school systems often dictate that certain information in textbooks must be covered and then tests are geared toward ascertaining that teachers did, indeed, teach the material in the textbooks. Teachers who are curious and creative and seek to inculcate these same qualities in their students sometimes want to supplement or altogether bypass textbooks, letting students, for instance, use actual original writings of authors, which textbooks may omit or only excerpt.

A science teacher at a high school in Chapel Hill, N.C. goes well beyond textbooks to create an environment in her classroom that she says "invites students into the mysteries and excitement of learning biology." Her room, replete with snakes, lizards, rodents, insects and aquatic creatures, is a place where students congregate in their free time before school, after school and during lunch. They hold the animals, eagerly clean the cages and borrow books from her extensive personal library.

At a middle school in Rex, Ga., a social studies teacher, who wants her students to understand how the past influenced the present, takes students out of the classroom onto the school grounds, where they conduct an archeological dig. This happens after the students research the site, design a hypothesis, choose a site for excavation, collect tools and set up rules for

the dig. This year, seeking evidence of the farm that once occupied the site, the students uncovered an old churn, a piece of a dinner plate and other "artifacts" that they displayed.

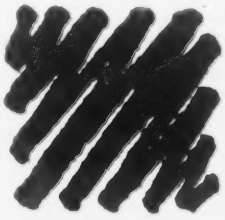
Teachers recognize the need for experiential education and for good alternative materials, but often find that they can obtain them only by paying out of their own pockets, an insulting and prohibitive activity. More than three-quarters of exceptional teachers say they have insufficient funds for supplies and materials. A survey by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching revealed this year that the average teacher spends about $500 a year of his or her own money in behalf of students.

Also, good teachers increasingly make use of computers and other forms of technology in all subjects—even if not called for in the official lesson plan—to embellish lessons and to allow students to create their own learning opportunities. In Memphis, an elementary school special education teacher says she has "opened a new world" for physically-impaired, non-communicative students, who for the first time—using specially-adapted computers—are able by themselves to write their own names.

But many teachers say they are thwarted by shortages of computers. And, sometimes when the computers are available, suitable software cannot be had or teachers cannot get sufficient training to learn how to make use of technology. In fact, 72 percent of exceptional teachers say that the lack of technology equipment is a barrier to their ability to teach and 71 percent say that they are similarly hindered by a lack of training in technology.

Students sometimes learn most from what they experience first-hand and teachers would like to provide students with more experiences, both inside and outside school, but they are limited by both funds and school policies. Thus, students who will live the overwhelming portion of their lives in the 21st century are forced to endure their schooling in ways that inadequately equip them for the world of the future.

Many exceptional teachers have established links beyond the school to get students in the community to enhance their learning and connect them to the world. A high school science teacher in Quitman, Ga. takes her students in a course in anatomy and physiology into hospitals in the community as they move through the units, studying different parts of the body. In an elementary school in San Jose, Calif., a teacher has formed a Young Astronaut Program through which scientists visit the school, teachers meet monthly for science workshops, students take field trips and weekly gatherings of students delve into topics in aviation and aerospace.



III
Students

1. Teachers should pay closer attention to boosting the self-esteem of students and, at the same time, motivate them to meet higher expectations.

Teacher after teacher at a meeting in Washington that brought together exceptional teachers from around the country spoke of the need to raise the self-esteem of students. They said that unless students feel good about themselves they are not apt to try as hard as they might.

Students who have confidence in themselves are more likely to enjoy school and to want to be a part of it. All too many children never exhibit such an attitude. In the early elementary grades they go through the motions of being students because they are dependent on adults. But when they grow older and more independent they start resisting school, coming in tardy, cutting school and—as soon as they are old enough—dropping out.

Some observers are inclined to scoff at the notion that it is up to the school to entice students to attend and to achieve. In an ideal world, these critics might be right, but when children have nothing in their lives outside of school that orients them toward academics then the school must make itself appealing or run the risk of losing the youngster.

Exceptional teachers say they are willing to take steps to motivate students, even though they wish that more students were self-motivated. These are the teachers who are most likely to give the extra time, to lavish the added attention, to do whatever it takes to get a child turned on to school.

A physical education teacher in an elementary school in St. Paul, Minn. has organized disabled students into a team to compete in wheelchair basketball, which he says has raised their self-esteem enormously. A music teacher in an elementary school in Washington, D.C. organized homeless children into singing groups that she said stressed confidence and success. And an industrial arts teacher in an elementary school in Detroit taught his students to design, build and sail model yachts that they entered in competition, an experience that he said motivated them to their maximum potential.

Frequently, a teacher must be willing and able to set a certain climate if students are to be motivated so that more may be expected of them. A high school science teacher in Florissant, Mo. has run a science club for the last seven years in which two or three dozen students dress up in colorful costumes and travel to elementary schools to demonstrate flashy experiments. Not only is the activity aimed at helping the high school students enjoy science, but it lays an early foundation for the youn-

ger students in the audiences to be inclined toward science.

Perhaps it is because they expect so much of their students that exceptional teachers are willing to work so hard to motivate them. They believe that standards should be high for all students and that many students who have not been striving will exert greater effort when more is asked of them.

An elementary school teacher in Ashland, Mass. writes a letter each January to her students at home telling them and their parents that during the next two months the youngsters will spend a portion of each day creating a poetry anthology around a theme chosen by the student. She makes clear to the children and their parents that every student is expected to become immersed in poetry in order to ferret out 20 favorite poems. Ultimately, the child must accompany each poem with an illustration and a written reaction and assemble the anthology with a dedication page, a table of contents and a bibliography.

A high school Latin teacher in Orchard Park, N.Y. expects her third year students—who already have risen to meet high expectations simply by enrolling in Latin for two years—to spend a week writing a script for a historical or mythological theatrical production that they present, in Latin, of course, to younger Latin students.

2. Students should be led to assume greater responsibility for their own learning so that they come to recognize the control that they have over the outcome of their education.

Exceptional teachers want to nurture and support students, but they do not want to coddle them. They want youngsters to grow into self-sufficient learners who can pursue lessons on their own. Students who feel somewhat in control of the learning situation are more likely to believe in what they are doing and to consider it important.

A high school English teacher in Fayetteville, Ga. tells her students at the outset of every term that they have the right and responsibility to decide for themselves how much they want to learn during the semester. "I believe that a teacher is an enabler who helps a student earn his or her own education," says this 16-year veteran teacher. "I respect them and care enough about them to let them make their own decisions about their education. On the surface this seems as if I am taking a big risk, but I have honestly found that when students finally realize that learning is something that they do, not something forced on them, they have an investment in the whole learning process."

The better the teacher, the more apt he or she is to want to

be a facilitator of learning, instead of posing as the repository of all knowledge. Many exceptional teachers do not want to have to tell students everything worth knowing. They prefer that students make guided discoveries for themselves, both alone and in small groups.

Some exceptional teachers say they have found that cooperative learning is a good vehicle for letting students assume more responsibility for their own education. This approach calls for students to work in teams in which each member handles a piece of the assignment upon which all of his or her classmates are dependent.

It takes an able teacher to create circumstances that will allow students to be in control of their learning. Such a teacher must know how to act as a kind of coach who carefully observes and selectively intervenes to help children stay on the track that leads to healthy intellectual development. Students of all ages are capable of being autonomous learners whether it is a first grader for whom play with blocks provides the foundation for learning about units of 10 or a high school student whose independent research skills lead him or her to discover the lessons of buoyancy in a laboratory.

3. More emphasis in every subject must be put on helping students become critical thinkers who can reason and solve problems.

Exceptional teachers worry that students are not learning to think critically. Almost three out of four teachers maintain that the job that public education is doing in teaching complex reasoning to students is only poor or fair. These teachers fear that an emphasis in education on right answers is not encouraging students to stretch their minds to the fullest.

The shortcomings show up on examinations of the National Assessment of Educational Progress that call for students to solve multi-step problems in math or read for deeper meaning in English or social studies. Also, the average score of students on the portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test that measures non-mathematical reasoning declined this year to a point as low as it as been in the last two decades. Teaching facts and basic skills is important, but it is not enough. Educators must reconsider the curriculum and the ways in which it is taught.

An elementary school teacher in Sewickley, Pa. incorporates the need for deep thinking and problem solving into as much work as possible. Frequently, students in her class are asked to find relationships between two or more seemingly unrelated subjects. They are encouraged to be creative and engage in

brainstorming that will take them in many directions that would not be traveled in the ordinary course of the lesson.

Some schools present specific instruction in thinking. At a middle school in Prince George's County, Md., a teacher has co-authored a manual for a program in the school that teachers use in teams, focusing on skills involved in the thinking process. Students work in groups to apply the skills, approaching them through a sequence of steps that they practice and then try to use in their subjects.

Schools must ask students in all grades to do more thinking. This means more reading, more writing, more problem solving in mathematics. Exceptional teachers recognize this and realize that they and their colleagues must assert leadership if change is to occur.

4. High priority must be given to teaching students of all ages to accept and carry out civic and social obligations.

Exceptional teachers are ready and willing to help their students become good citizens. These teachers are concerned that unless schools play a larger role in shaping the values of students young people are in jeopardy of growing up on the fringes of responsibility. The greatest worries of the public regarding students have to do with drug use and misconduct.

Only 5 percent of exceptional teachers say that public education is doing an excellent job when it comes to teaching students to have a sense of responsibility. Forty-seven percent judge the schools as good in this area, 39 percent say the job being done is only fair and 9 percent say it is poor. Schools, of course, are not insulated from the ills of the larger society and this causes teachers to think that the only protection with which they can reasonably equip students is the safeguard of solid values.

Many exceptional teachers try to engage students in projects and activities that will cultivate the fundamentals of responsible citizenship. It is a matter of helping students become "thoughtful and caring," according to an elementary school teacher in upstate New York. A high school social studies teacher in Wexford, Pa., for instance, takes his students into mental hospitals about 10 times a year to learn about mental illness and serve as volunteers to the patients, leading 1,800 students to contribute 5,000 hours in service during the last seven years.

In Arizona, a high school social studies teacher has involved his students annually for the last 12 years in a four-day statewide program to study issues of government in the state. Another

exceptional teacher at the same high school devotes considerable amounts of her time to advising members of the Student Council, viewing her investment as an attempt to shape attitudes that may last a lifetime.

An approach used by an elementary school teacher in North Tonawanda, N.Y. is meant to teach social responsibility to children by helping them see how they can behave in ways that will lead adults to take them seriously. Students identify adults outside their family whom they admire and then write to them to ask them to speak or write to the class about their jobs and their lives.

Teachers such as these would like to see the school's influence extend beyond the classroom to encompass the before-school and after-school lives of children. The teachers are willing to get involved in this way if it means helping students to turn out "right."

One way to cultivate caring among young people is through service and growing numbers of teachers encourage and even require students to join service programs in the community, frequently in conjunction with a course. In Montgomery County, Md., a high school English teacher has helped run a project that gets students to serve in soup kitchens, environmental offices, shelters for the homeless, rehabilitation centers, homes for the elderly and other sites. Many students continued their service even after the formal involvement through the school ended.

IV Reinforcing Education

1. Links must be forged between schools and social service agencies to better serve children and their families by addressing the wide range of needs that affect the academic performance of students.

Exceptional teachers worry that schools, at best, are able to deal with only a small portion of the needs of children. These teachers speak frequently of the "whole child," and talk about the plethora of physical, social and emotional needs of children that go unmet even in the most caring school environments. Everyday, teachers see children who are hungry, children who live in neighborhoods so dangerous that they are afraid to go home and children whose parents have no time for them. Most schools, as they are now constituted, are simply unequipped to help such students.

"I firmly believe that one of the most important issues that we as teachers face today is the increasing need for the school to serve as 'home' for many of our children," said an elementary school teacher in West Valley, N.Y. "Many of the responsibilities that once belonged to the families now are expected of teachers and schools. We, as teachers, must realize the important impact we have in this process and do our best to fulfill that need."

The difficulties that complicate the education of some students are inextricably wrapped into the fabric of family life and efforts to assist these children are apt to fail unless policies take cognizance of parental circumstances. Despite the obvious importance of academics, the success of education depends on more than appealing to the intellect. An important advance, exceptional teachers say, is the growing interest in providing some social services in the school and making the school a referral center for other sorts of services for the entire family.

One middle school math teacher in Houston took the leadership in her school to form a partnership with a family service center that provided counseling in the school for students. These are youngsters who the teacher says "are influenced by family problems that prevent them from learning." During the past two years, counseling was given through the program for several students who contemplated suicide, a student who watched his mother inject drugs into her neck, for students who experienced incest with a stepfather or older brother, students whose close friends died, students with alcoholic or abusive parents and students who could not obtain immigration amnesty applications because their parents could not afford the cost.

2. Schools must work closer with the home so that parents feel more connected to the education of their children and are more able to underpin the process.

The link between how children are raised and how they do in school is indisputable. Certain out-of-school experiences contribute mightily to scholastic achievement. For example, children to whom books are read and who have the opportunity to engage in rich discussion with adults are far more apt to have good vocabularies and be strong readers.

Teachers can easily identify the students who have had the benefit of such experiences. This does not mean that students who have had less intellectual support at home are doomed to fail, but it is fair to say that school may be more difficult for them.

Exceptional teachers are persuaded that the first step in improving educational achievement is for parents to be more actively committed to the schooling of their children. Almost three out of four of the teachers say that lack of parental involvement is a barrier to the teacher's effectiveness.

Until recently, the school seldom reached out to the home and felt no obligation to do so. Increasingly, though, educators recognize that by engaging parents and involving them in the schooling of their children, the children are more likely to get the kind of support that will help them succeed as learners. One exceptional teacher makes it a practice to send a newsletter to parents, call them on the phone and even visit them in their homes. "Students become more enthusiastic about learning and are more disciplined when their parents are involved," he said.

Many exceptional teachers take similar approaches to reach parents and they say they would like to see other teachers do the same. A parent of a child in the class of a teacher at an intermediate school in Mt. Clemens, Mich. praised the teacher for encouraging input from parents and for welcoming parents into the classroom anytime they want to come. "Good communication between parents and teacher allows for a consistent approach toward the student, who is the real winner in a situation like this," said the parent in writing a letter in support of the teacher's nomination for Thanks To Teachers.

"Parents as Partners" is a program run by a kindergarten teacher in Cinnaminson, N.J. to unite the efforts of home and school. Parents are contacted personally, given an orientation and then invited to visit the classroom to observe their children whenever they wish. She sends weekly reports to parents about the progress of their children and about each area of the curriculum being covered. At the conclusion of the school year,

parents are given activity packets so that they can pursue summer learning experiences with their children.

In Trumbull, Conn., parents of high school students were invited to study the same unit on America's Progressive Era as their children. The unit was team-taught by an elite teacher of English and her colleague, a social studies teacher.

Another teacher, in Pittsboro, N.C., lures parents into her elementary school by asking them to share their talents with the students. For example, a nurse brought a skeleton at Halloween and taught the children the names of the bones, a carpenter showed the children how to build birdhouses and a mother who worked at McDonald's asked the children to make valentines in Februrary that she hung in the restaurant. "Rather than removing parents from the educational environment, we must adapt to changes in family structures and schedules," says the teacher, who has spent 23 years in the classroom. "Parent-teacher communication must increase and parents must become directly involved in teaching their own children on a daily basis."

3. Schools should expand and strengthen their ties to business, to policymakers and to the general public, starting with programs to invite leading citizens to "shadow" individual teachers through the workday.

Most adult Americans are simply too far removed from the schools, too distant either to contribute to the well being of the schools or to appreciate just how much is being asked of the schools. The era has passed when the schools could expect to carry out their role in isolation.

Educators need allies besides parents. Employers and agencies in both the public and private sector can provide resources to cushion the schools, as well as moral support for students and teachers. Exceptional teachers have taken the lead in forming partnerships with business, higher education, community agencies and other entities that might have something to offer the schools. Eighty-eight percent of them say they have formed partnerships with members of the business community.

These teachers are entrepreneurial and they welcome help wherever they can find it. They say that this has meant money, equipment, supplies and expertise that would not otherwise have been available for the schools. Apparently, the support of the principal is crucial in such efforts, as 78 percent of exceptional teachers credit the principal with giving a lot of help and encouragement for collaboration.

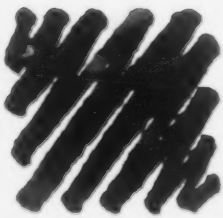
At a school in False Pass, Alaska that educates children from

kindergarten through the 12th grade, a vocational teacher has helped bring about collaboration with the outside community that is now a hallmark of the school. A local seafood company, the major employer in town, releases one of its employees to teach and coach at the school. The company also lets the school use its shop for an engine repair class.

The value of ties with business was demonstrated in stunning fashion to a foreign language teacher at a high school in Texas. She found that students resisted enrolling in her Russian courses because of pressure by parents and members of the community who considered it unpatriotic for an American youth to study a "Communist" language. It was only recently, after local business people whom she had cultivated endorsed Russian studies, that enrollments started rising.

Exceptional teachers think that schools make a mistake when they try to remain aloof from the public. They especially want leaders in business and government to know more about the difficulties under which schools labor. They think that the role of the schools would be better appreciated and teachers would be more respected for their contributions if influential people got into the schools to see first-hand just how much is being asked of the school. One idea that exceptional teachers have is for the creation of "shadowing" programs through which leading citizens would regularly be assigned to spend time in school observing good teachers at work.

Ultimately, it is the hope of exceptional teachers that the public will come to a more thorough understanding of what is involved in the day to day operation of the schools. The teachers think that inevitably such a realization would lead to teachers being asked more frequently what they think should be the direction of public policy that affects education. Also, the teachers say that it is necessary to bring more people closer to the school, whether or not they have children enrolled, because this is a way for everyone to feel that they have a stake in the schools.



Acknowledgements

This report is the collective vision of 115 exceptional teachers selected nationally from among thousands of teachers nominated by the public and their peers, in a teacher recognition program called THANKS TO TEACHERS. Those nominations were reviewed by other educators, business and civic leaders, in 23 major metropolitan media markets where the program was centered.

THANKS TO TEACHERS was sponsored by Apple Computer, Inc., in partnership with the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE), the National Alliance of Business, and Group W Broadcasting. The ideas, opinions and perspectives of the 115 honored teachers, whose names follow, are at the heart of this report. The report also reflects the information gathered from 230 THANKS TO TEACHERS nominees in a Gallup Poll.

THE TEACHERS, LISTED BY METROPOLITAN MEDIA MARKET, ARE:

From Alaska:

Linn Clawson of False Pass
Sondra Dexter of Anchorage
Karen Kay Faerber of Trapper Creek
Diane K. Frank of Anchorage
Nancy M. Sallee of Palmer

From Albuquerque:

Roberta E. Cocking of Los Alamos
Pat Stuever Graff of Albuquerque
Carolyn A. Mitchell of Albuquerque
Carolyn Paez of Albuquerque
Judith Lynne Stoughton of Albuquerque

From Atlanta, Georgia:

Marjorie Anliker of Fayetteville
Amberly Benefield of Rex
Marjorie Kellogg of Marietta
Sam W. Preston III of Senoia
Cynthia Kennedy of Lawrenceville

From Baltimore, Maryland:

Mary Katherine Curl of Seabrook
Mildred G. McDaniel of Baltimore
Cheryl G. Monk of Abingdon
James Patrick Whitehurst of Bel Air
Laurie Haines Whitley of Bridge

From Boston, Massachusetts:

Caryl Adamowitch-LaPorte of Ashby
Suzanne Galvin of Boston
Glenice U. Kelley of Westford
Jane Mason of Ashland
Brenda I.Richardson of Dorchester

From Buffalo, New York:

Margaret M. Curran of Orchard Park
Donna McQuillen of North Tonawanda
Caroline Parrinello of Buffalo
Bonnie Geralyn Smith of West Valley
Douglas Smith of Tonawanda

From Dallas, Texas:

Barbara Cargill of Hurst
Susan Kay Thatcher Fisher of Dallas
Sharon Morrow of Bedford
Louise Mary O'Keefe of Dallas
Heather J. Wood of Dallas

From Detroit, Michigan:

William F. Ferris of Detroit
Delores Aaron Flagg of Southfield
Olivia Dianne Gilbert of Detroit
Alan Katsimpalis of Detroit
Susan Mortimer of Livonia

From Hartford, Connecticut:

James M. Crawford of Westbrook
Mary Bernadette Curtiss of Trumbull
Lydia Forgetta-Sheffield of Madison
Wally Lamb of Norwich
Gay K. Sabin of Greenfield

From Hawaii:

Mary Frances Higuchi of Mililani
Sandra Larson of Kamuela
Verna M. Rabacal of Ewa Beach
Harry C.Y. Wong of Honolulu
Arleen Yoshimura of Hilo

From Houston, Texas:

Mary Charlotte Elliott of Spring
Jane A. Holzapfel of Houston
Elizabeth Lee McLendon of Bellaire
Frank A. Salinas of Houston
Kay Aileen Smitherman of Angleton

From Memphis, Tennessee:

Jane K.S. Ford of Memphis
Richard H. Trah of Memphis
Joseph S. York of Somerville
Eleanore Zurbruegg of Memphis
Karen S. Anderson of Memphis

From Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota:

Rebecca Sauser Christopherson of St. Paul
Linda Devitt of Morris
Pamela Foster of St. Paul
Frederick L. Johnson of St. Paul
Kathryn Margraf of Spooner, WI

From Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:

Marie Kanalas Bogle of Philadelphia
Judi Harris of Elkins Park
James R. Kelly of Heightstown
Jacqueline Minniti of Philadelphia
John M. Petronglo of Mount Holly, NJ

From Phoenix, Arizona:

Julianne M. Berkel of Scottsdale
Laura Brakney of Mesa
John Calvin of Scottsdale
Garthanne deOcampo of Phoenix
Kathleen M. Wiebke of Scottsdale

From Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:

Milana K. Bizic of Sewickley
Sandra Lee Graham of New Castle
Patricia Palazzolo of Upper St. Clair
Joyce Royster-Fullum of Pittsburgh
Robert I. Will of Wexford

From Raleigh, North Carolina:

Millie Baggett of Pittsboro
Julia A. Cazin of Raleigh
Nancy Robb Cope of Raleigh
Judith D. Jones of Chapel Hill
Cleo A. Saffoe of Fayetteville

From Sacramento, California:

Jim Carvalho of Orangevale
Susan E. Laskey of Orangevale
Jayne Marlink of North Highlands
Michael J. Blake of Grass Valley
Violet G. Boland of Modesto

From Salt Lake City, Utah:

Jay M. Cottam of Salt Lake City
Barbara A. Lewis of Salt Lake City
Barbara M. Naanes of Salt Lake City
Kathryn A. Taylor of Tooele
Brandon Thacker of Bountiful

From San Fransisco, California:

Diane A. Bridger of Sunnyvale
Bruce A. Kennedy of Oakland
Barbara Ranelletti of Hayward
Marc E. Roth of Cupertino
Juanita A. Ryan of San Jose

From St. Louis, Missouri:

Joyce A. Giger of St. Louis
Suzanne E. Grade of St. Louis
James C. Harpel of St. Louis
Linda M. Kralina of Florissant
Gary Swalley of Edwardsville

From Tallahassee, Florida:

Gregory L. Brown of Tallahassee
Sheila Farrell Bullington of Thomasville
Judy H. Holwell of Quitman
Connie O. Walberg of Tallahassee
Queen Webster of Crawfordville

From Washington, D.C.:

Anne Catharine David of Alexandria, VA
Eleanor Marie Fowler of Washington, D.C.
Rebecca A. Lewis of Capitol Heights, MD
Donna S. Mason of Washington, D.C.
Susan King Ryback of Bethesda, MD

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Robert Fain
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Ken Wright

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